

EXECUTIVE OFFICER SUMMARY REPORT
April 08, 2009

- ITEM: 14
- SUBJECT: STATUS REPORT: Aliso Creek Watershed, Orange County. The Regional Board requested a status report on current and proposed projects in the watershed. The report will include status of water quality of Aliso Creek and municipal runoff problems. The Regional Board will not consider taking action but may provide direction regarding Aliso Creek. (Chad Loflen)
- PURPOSE: To provide an update to the Board on the status of Aliso Creek, including issues regarding water quality standards, projects likely to affect water quality and the Regional Board's regulatory authority.
- PUBLIC NOTICE: Information about the status report was provided in the agenda mailing and posted on-line.
- DISCUSSION: The Aliso Creek watershed (Supporting Document No. 1) is located within the San Juan Hydrologic Unit in southwest Orange County, California. Aliso Creek is the major drainage for the watershed, which encompasses an area of approximately 36 square miles. The Aliso Creek headwaters originate near the foothills of the Cleveland National Forest generally northeast of the Cities of Lake Forest and Mission Viejo. Aliso Creek flows in a southwesterly direction for almost 20 miles, receiving tributary flows throughout the watershed before draining into the Pacific Ocean at Aliso Beach in the City of Laguna Beach.
- The current designated Beneficial Uses for Aliso Creek include AGR, REC1, REC2, WARM and WILD. The Aliso Creek Mouth is designated as REC1, REC2, WILD, RARE and MAR. Species known to historically exist in the creek and creek mouth include the endangered southern steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss irideus*, see Supporting Document 2), the tidewater goby (*Eucyclogobius newberryi*, planned for possible re-introduction), and the southwestern pond turtle (*Actinemys marmorata pallida*, a species of concern).

Historically, Aliso Creek was an intermittent stream whose dominant discharge and natural sediment yield occurred predominantly during storm events. Beginning in the 1960's, urban development began in the upper portion of the watershed, namely upstream of Aliso Creek Road. In 1969, two concrete drop structures were built upstream and downstream of Aliso Creek Road and in the early 1990s, a riprap drop structure was built within the Aliso-Wood Canyon Wilderness Park as part of a mitigation bank project. The portion of the watershed upstream of the park is considered to be built-out and highly developed. In total, 7 cities and the County of Orange discharge from their municipal separate storm sewer systems (MS4) into Aliso Creek and/or its tributaries. Additionally, Aliso Creek has been the receiving water for multiple projects requiring a Clean Water Act Section 401 Water Quality Certification from the Regional Board.

Currently, no publicly or privately owned treatment works have Waste Discharge Requirements that allow them to discharge into Aliso Creek. There have been occasional spills of raw and treated sewage from various agencies to the creek. Four agencies, Irvine Ranch Water District, El Toro Water District, Moulton Niguel Water District and the City of Laguna Beach operate sewage collection systems within the watershed. They are required to report spills from the system. The South Orange County Waste Water Authority operates an ocean outfall located off the mouth of Aliso Creek that services four treatment plants. In addition, the watershed also utilizes recycled water, some of which may be adding to excessive dry weather flows.

Aliso Creek is currently on the Clean Water Act Section 303(d) list for indicator bacteria, phosphorus and toxicity, with potential sources being urban runoff/storm sewers, unknown point sources and nonpoint/point sources. The mouth of Aliso Creek is listed for indicator bacteria. In 2001 the Regional Board issued a California Water Code Section 13225 Directive to the County of Orange and Cities within the watershed to investigate the high indicator bacteria levels in Aliso Creek. Additionally, the monitoring of dry weather non-storm water flows has shown exceedances of Basin Plan Objectives for turbidity, nutrients and metals. Increased flow is an issue in Aliso Creek, and severe hydromodification has occurred, specifically within Aliso-

Wood Canyon Park. Extensive upstream urban development and the placement of in-stream hardened structures have contributed to the erosion and destabilization of Aliso Creek channel banks.

The State and Regional Board currently exercises authority on preventing and allowing discharges to and from Aliso Creek through the following Orders:

Municipal Storm Water

Order R9-2002-001, Waste Discharge Requirements for Discharges of Urban Runoff from the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4s) Draining the Watersheds of the County of Orange, the Incorporated Cities of Orange County, and the Orange County Flood Control District within the San Diego Region

Dredge and Fill Activities

Clean Water Act Section 401 Water Quality Certifications intended to ensure protection of Water Quality Standards

Waste Water Collection Systems

Order No. R9-2007-0005, Waste Discharge Requirement for Sewage Collection Agencies in the San Diego Region

Order No. 2006-0003-DWQ, Statewide General Waste Discharge Requirements for Sanitary Sewer Systems

Waste Water Treatment Plants

Order No. R9-2006-0055, Waste Discharge Requirements for the South Orange County Wastewater Authority Discharge to the Pacific Ocean via the Aliso Creek Ocean Outfall.

Recycled Water

Order No. 97-52, Waste Discharge and Water Recycling Requirements for the Production and Purveyance of Recycled Water by Member Agencies of the South Orange County Reclamation Authority, Orange County

In addition, the State Water Resources Control Board Division of Water Rights has authority over the water rights of Aliso Creek.

This agenda package also contains a list of projects in the watershed that are likely to require Regional Board input (Supporting Document 3) and a recent news article from the Laguna Beach Independent on Aliso Creek (Supporting Document 4).

LEGAL CONCERNS: None.

SUPPORTING
DOCUMENTS:

1. Map of the Aliso Creek Watershed
2. National Marine Fisheries Service Letter
3. List of Projects likely to involve the Regional Board
4. Laguna Beach Independent News Article
dated March 20, 2009.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Board will not be taking an action on this item.